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AMERICA'S LAND QUESTION.

THE growth and prosperity of the United States have been explained as simply due to a wealth of emigration and a wealth of public domain. We have had labor and land in abundance. Imported brawn and natural resources have been the raw material transmuted by time into the present general welfare.

The people have not readily listened to the suggestion that out of that which has been so largely the means of our prosperity, may spring one of the worst dangers to our social and political well being. Rome fell by reason of great landed estates. "*Lati-fundia perdidere Italian*," says Pliny. An American land question is already assuming shape as well as scope; and its bearings can not too speedily challenge public attention and treatment.

The number of great farms is doubling every three years; the renters are gaining on the land owners; private corporations own swaths of territory equal to a dozen States; and, what seems most to have touched the national pride, foreign landlords have possessed themselves of millions of our best acres.

A brief statement of these matters in detail is the best presentation of the American land question.

The growth of large farms will be made to appear from a comparison of statistics gathered in 1870 and in 1880:

	1870.	1880.	Increase.
Farms under 100 acres.....	2,075,338	2,208,374	10 per cent.
Farms 100 acres or over, and under			
500 acres.....	565,054	1,695,983	200 "
Farms 500 acres or over and under			
1000 acres.....	15,000	75,000	500 "
Farms over 1000 acres.....	3,400	28,600	800 "

Large farms invariably carry with them, as necessary auxiliaries, tenants and farm laborers. The increase and permanence of the one imply the increase and permanence of the other. An American tenant class doing the drudgery of agriculture, but owning

not a foot of American soil, is not a pleasing prospect for those who have at heart the continuance of our social and political equality. Yet the census of 1880 tells us that there are more than a million American tenant farmers (1,024,000)—two hundred thousand more than Ireland had in the palmiest day of Irish landlordism.

The kernel of the evil is reached when we come to consider the lavishness with which the public domain has been granted away to railroad corporations. In a large sense these grants have been premiums and largesses offered by Congress for the establishment upon our soil of the landed system that prevailed in feudal Europe. So, at least, they have operated. Behind every land grant to a railroad has stood, as the real beneficiary, some native or foreign landlord.

The first grant was made September 20, 1850, to the State of Illinois in aid of the Illinois Central Railroad. The total number of acres conveyed was 2,595,000. Up to 1861, the railroads received in this manner nearly twelve million acres—Louisiana, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, being the States chiefly benefited. The land thus disposed of could not have been valued at over two dollars per acre. The national debt during the years intervening from 1850 to 1860 did not, during any year, exceed \$70,000,000. At times it was below \$40,000,000. The annual revenue from customs during the same years varied from forty to sixty-five millions. If it were expedient to aid railroad building, this aid should have been voted in money and not in land. The country was rich enough and prosperous enough to tax itself two and a half millions per annum, rather than show itself liberal with the lands reserved by nature for a future generation.

The progress of the evil during the decade 1850–60 was mild compared to what it became in the years intervening from 1861–7. Up to July 1, 1862, Congress had followed the Democratic notion of granting the lands to the States in the first instance. It was a mere fiction, but it operated well in restraining the greed of corporations and in placing them under more local and systematic supervision. With the grant of 12,000,000 acres, direct, to the Union Pacific, by act of July 1, 1862, a new policy was begun. Then, and in the subsequent years, the nation was undergoing the supreme trial of its existence. It was the dark hour of distress and danger. The debt rose from \$564,000,000 in 1862, to \$1,120,-

000,000 in 1863, and to \$2,681,000,000 in 1864. The great corporations at this juncture seem like harpies rushing in to divide the estate of the dying republic. It became a matter of competition between them to see how much of the public domain they could grasp during this supreme opportunity.

More than a hundred million acres—twice the extent of all the New England States—were fleeced from the people by the corporations during the years of the civil conflict. Thus, while fighting to retain eleven refractory States, the nation permitted itself to be cozened out of territory sufficient to form twelve new republics. The following table, arranged from the figures furnished in Spoford's *American Almanac* for 1885 will show the magnitude of the nation's loss :

Land given by Congress to different States, in aid of railways.....	36,000,000 acres.
Land given by Congress direct to railway corporations,	136,000,000 "
Total.....	172,000,000 acres.

Here is an expanse of territory only a little less in extent than the thirteen original colonies, and larger than France and England combined !

The grants, direct, to corporations are thus enumerated by the Librarian of Congress :

	Acres.
July 1, 1862 To the Union Pacific.....	12,000,000
July 1, 1862 " Central Br. Union Pacific.....	187,000
July 1, 1862 " Kansas Pacific.....	6,000,000
M'ch 3, 1869 " Union Pacific (successor to the Denver Pacific)	1,000,000
July 1, 1862 " Central Pacific.....	8,000,000
July 1, 1862 } " Central Pacific (successor to the Western	
" 2, 1864 } Pacific).....	1,100,000
M'ch 3, 1855 }	
May 21, 1866 }	
1864 " Burlington & Mo.....	2,441,000
1864 " Sioux City & Pacific	60,000
1864 " Northern Pacific.....	47,000,000
1866 " Oregon Br. Central Pacific.....	3,000,000
1866 " Oregon and Cal	3,500,000
1866 " Atlantic & Pacific.....	42,000,000
1868 } " Southern Pacific.....	3,520,000
1871 }	6,000,000
Total.....	135,808,000

The number of miles of railroad in operation in 1860 was 30,000; in 1870, 52,000; in 1880, 84,000, and in 1885, 120,000. Without land appropriations the growth of railroads has been more rapid in these late years, even relatively, than at any time in the epoch of lavish State aid. The wisdom as well as the honesty of the Congresses of 1861-7 is impugned by these figures.

With a list of the locations of the largest farms and ranches of the United States in one hand, and a map indicating the ranges of territory granted to railway corporations, in the other, it will readily appear how the estates of our future landed gentry have been carved out of the domain lavished on railroads. The following table of foreign and non-resident land-holders in the United States is from the Congressional Record :

	Acres.
An English syndicate No. 3, own in Texas.....	3,000,000
The Holland Land Company, New Mexico.....	4,500,000
Sir Edward Reid and a syndicate, in Florida.....	2,000,000
English syndicate in Mississippi.....	1,800,000
Marquis of Tweeddale.....	1,750,000
Phillips, Marshall & Co., London.....	1,300,000
German syndicate.....	1,000,000
Anglo-American syndicate, London.....	750,000
Byron H. Evans, of London.....	700,000
Duke of Sutherland.....	425,000
British Land Company, in Kansas.....	320,000
William Whalley, M.P., Peterborough, England.....	310,000
Missouri Land Company, Edinburg, Scotland.....	300,000
Robert Tennant, of London.....	230,000
Dundee Land Company, Scotland.....	247,000
Lord Dunmore.....	120,000
Benjamin Newgas, Liverpool.....	100,000
Lord Houghton, in Florida.....	60,000
Lord Dunraven, in Colorado.....	60,000
English Land Company, in Florida.....	60,000
English Land Company, in Arkansas.....	50,000
Albert Peel, M.P., Leicestershire, England.....	10,000
Sir J. L. Kay, Yorkshire, England.....	5,000
Alexander Grant, of London, in Kansas.....	35,000
English syndicate, Wisconsin.....	110,000
M. Ellerhausen, of Halifax, in West Virginia.....	600,000
A Scotch syndicate, in Florida.....	500,000
A. Boysen, Danish Consul, in Milwaukee.....	50,000
Missouri Land Company, of Edinburg.....	165,000
Total.....	20,647,000

Here we have an expanse of territory as large as Ireland in the possession of twenty-nine alien absentee landlords. How long will we retain our proud pre-eminence as the consoler of the down-trodden tenantry of other lands when we are nurturing a more gigantic landlordism at home? The native land-holders make an equally formidable array. The late Colonel Murphy left an estate of more than 4,000,000 acres; the Standard Oil Company owns 1,000,000 acres; ex-Senator Dorsey has 500,000 acres in New Mexico, and Disston has over 2,000,000 acres in Florida. We need scarcely recall the Glenn, Vanderbilt and Dalrymple wheat farms or the great cattle ranches of Texas. In New York—the Empire State—there are landlords “full blown” like Mr. Clark and Colonel Church—the latter of whom collects his rents from 180 farms, some of them 500 acres in size, and all made valuable by the increasing density of population.

The landed property of the following three railroads is suggestive of the material still left to be elaborated into landlordism:

The Texas Pacific Railroad owns.....	18,000,000 acres.
The Northern Pacific “ “	47,000,000 “
The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad owns.....	42,000,000 “

A total of..... 107,000,000 “

Considering the great wealth of public domain which Uncle Sam had at the outset it is amazing to contemplate the brief period in which he has squandered his estate.

Exclusive of the thirteen colonies and of Texas, which by the treaty of annexation retained the ownership of all the land within its borders, the public domain was made up as follows:

Cessions from the original States.....	229,987,187 acres.
Louisiana purchase	756,961,280 “
Florida “	37,931,520 “
Mexican treaty	334,443,520 “
Texas purchase	65,130,880 “
Gadsden “	29,142,400 “
Alaska “	369,529,600 “

1,823,180,387 “

We must deduct from these as acres “not available:”

Alaska, with	369,529,600 acres.
The Indian and Military Reservation, with.....	157,000,000 “
Mountain and untillable lands (estimated)	400,000,000 “

A total of..... 926,529,600 “

This would leave as available, nearly	900,000,000 Acres.
Of this domain, there have passed into the possession of private parties and actual settlers, over	300,000,000 “
Congress has given to the States	161,000,000 “
(79,000,000 acres being devoted to schools and 70,000,000 being granted as swamp land).	
For land bounties for military and naval service ..	61,000,000 “
For canals and wagon roads	6,000,000 “
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A total average of	525,000,000 “

If to this we add the 172,000,000 acres previously enumerated as granted to railroads, it will be seen that 700,000,000 acres of the 900,000,000 available in the public domain have been disposed of and but 200,000,000 remain. There are private and State land claims amounting to 85,000,000 acres that we have not considered in these figures. Perhaps it may not be overstating the truth to say that the public domain has fewer arable acres to-day than the number granted away so lavishly to railway corporations during the epoch 1861-7.

Certainly, in view of the fact that the number of acres disposed of under the Homestead and Lumber Culture Acts, has averaged 10,000,000 acres per annum during the past five years, it seems clear that by the end of the century we shall have no public lands open for cultivation and that the words of the song :

“ Uncle Sam has land enough to give us all a farm,”

will suggest nothing but a sorrowful reminiscence.

A. J. DESMOND.